

Bright Rags

Ah, the great black cypress of Hannibal the Carthaginian,
Who drank a dab of death-fire from his ring-finger
On the Bursa road!

Today that tree is tied with prayers
By the votive-minded ladies of the neighborhood.
They climb from the village of Eskihisar, clutching
Their shawls of discretion, to tie those love-knots
On its boughs. They crouch in their vivid pantaloons
With their surcoats pinned like grief about them,
To whisper it cantative bits of the Koran, begging
A cure to the luck that fails. And what could be
Kinder than silence to the flame of their candles?

Ballad of Beddington

I heard the cry of a loon
It was the ghost of Stephan Rothermell
Who under my window-ledge would step
To throw a scare into my soul

I heard the cry of an ant
It was my old friend Leroy Zick
A razor-strop in his father's house
He came along to be nervous

I heard a whistle with fingers in it
It was that fair-haired ghost Jim Lang
When laughter made him weak
He'd stretch out on the street

But the moon no good in the sky
Pock-marked, whey-faced, puny
As we went out rolling
With our hands in our pockets
Down hills and holes and river-beds
Pretending to be destined logs
Abrupt to the bottom we bounced
There stood a Devil with a saw-mill
Shouting orders to his Swedes
They cut us up and stacked us up
To serve more human needs.

-- James Lovett